



Childhood Connections

July 9, 2025

Spotlight on Office of Childhood Teams!

Throughout 2025, this newsletter will spotlight team members who work in the Office of Childhood (OOC) and their “why” for supporting children, families, and the professionals who work directly with them.



Stephanie Chandler is the Program Manager of the Quality Programs section. In this role, she leads the Preschool, Afterschool, Professional Development, Quality Initiatives, and Child Care Health Consultation teams. Stephanie has dedicated her career to serving children and families spending over twenty years working hands-on in the field operating a family child care program, serving as a Parent Educator with the Parents As Teachers program, and serving as a child care center director in an accredited program before entering state government. Her “why” is to bring a voice from the field to develop meaningful supports for educators and improve outcomes for children. She is passionate about providing children with high quality early learning experiences to set them on a path as successful lifetime learners.

Cindy Heislen is the Afterschool Program Coordinator in Quality Programs. Her team oversees federal and state funding that provides competitive grant funding for afterschool programming. They also ensure effective implementation of federal and state regulations. She works with many partners and stakeholders around the state to build systems that support afterschool programs. Cindy has worked in DESE’s Afterschool program for 34



years. Her 'why' comes from seeing how afterschool programs can support the health, safety, academic success, and well-being of each child it serves, while also keeping children safe and giving working parents peace of mind.



Beth Loethen is the Preschool Program Coordinator in Quality Programs. Her team oversees programs here in the OOC including Missouri Quality Pre-K (MOQPK) Grants, Early Childhood Special Education, and the Kindergarten Entry Assessment. Beth has spent her entire career working to improving education opportunities and outcomes for children in Missouri. Beth has served as a classroom teacher, worked in the First Steps program, lead a team as a part of the Quality Assurance Report (QAR) project and supported school health initiatives at the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS). Her "why" is to make sure that every child across the state has an opportunity to grow and learn.

ANNOUNCEMENT! Home Visitors Nominated for Home Visitor of the Year

Several Missouri Home Visitors were nominated for the [Home Visitor of the Year award from the Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals](#). Five Missouri nominees, representing both urban and rural areas of the state, are featured on the Institute's website:

- Heather Sandlin, Mid-Buchanan County R-V School District
- Robin Lloyd, Show Me Strong Families



UPDATE! Additional Dates for Home Visiting Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) with a Conscious Approach to Discipline

The Center for Child Well-Being (CCWB) in partnership with DESE

- Tracy Robinson, Lee's Summit R-VII School District
- Hannah Colvin, Lee's Summit R-VII School District
- Gaby Farias, Kirkwood R-VII School District

We are proud to recognize the work of these nominees and of all home visitors across the state of Missouri!

TRAINING! Social-Emotional Learning Modules (SEL) for Home Visitors

The Center for Child Well-Being (CCWB) has developed a 2-part learning series for home visitors, building on the SEL foundational class. In these two modules, discipline strategies will be discussed in more detail, along with how to help families to respond to challenging behavior in ways that support children's social-emotional learning and reduce challenging behavior.

Social-emotional learning serves as a protective factor against future behavioral and mental health risks. Home visitors have the unique opportunity to support children's social-emotional development within the context of the child's family and home. [Visit this link for dates and registration.](#)

NEW! First Missouri Home Visitor to Receive Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential

Holly Gordillo from Santa Fe R-X School District is the first home visitor with the Parent Education Program to earn her CDA credential for home visitors.

"Earning my CDA has boosted my confidence in knowing that I have a national credential to back up my professional work with families and children. Being a lone ranger parent educator, it feels like a lot of what I do goes unseen but having this credential helps me remember my professional importance."

Congratulations Holly.

SAVE THE DATE! Conference on the Young Years

will be offering SEL with a Conscious Approach to Discipline for Home Visitors on two additional dates in August and September.

The dates are listed in the [registration link](#). If there is no option to select a date under registration, it means that all classes are full at this time. Please check back later as more spaces will open up if other attendees cancel. To be added to the waiting list for cancellations, please contact CCWB at cfe-childwell-being@health.missouri.edu.

During this "foundational" training, you will learn how to understand the relationship between the brain and misbehavior, how to identify effective SEL practices, and how to identify parent engagement opportunities during your interactions with families during home visits.

NEW! Bilingual Book Collection Available for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Missouri

The Dolly Parton's Imagination Library expanded its Bilingual Book Collection to Missouri starting June 2025. Existing families can log into their parent portal to choose the new Bilingual English/Spanish Book Collection. New families will be able to



select which book collection they prefer when enrolling:

- **English** – Mostly English books with an occasional bilingual English/Spanish book
- **Bilingual English/Spanish** – All (100%) bilingual English/Spanish books

The 53rd Conference on the Young Years (CYY) will be March 5-7, 2026, at Tan-Tar-A Conference Center in Osage Beach, Missouri. For more information, please visit the [CYY webpage](#).

Learn about Imagination Library enrollment in your area by [visiting our Imagination Library webpage](#).

Monthly MOPD Quick Tip

Did you know that the Missouri Professional Development (MOPD) system training search has filter options to help find training using different criteria? When on the training search page, use the boxes on the left side of the screen to filter trainings by topics such as: title, trainer, location, CDA content area, fees, target audience, or ages addressed within the training. Find a training of interest from the returned results.

If no results are found, try a different keyword or fewer search criteria. For full [MOPD Instructions](#), see the topic 'Search and Register for Training', or [the Training Search instructional video](#). DESE's Office of Childhood Training Library provides free online, on-demand training for users to access 24/7. 22 of the 30 trainings have been recently revised for enhanced performance. Please watch the [Take an E-Learning Course instructional video](#) or see [MOPD Instructions](#) on 'Complete a DESE E-Learning Course' with the sponsor name 'DESE OOC' to find DESE courses.

Spotlight on Success

Spotlight on Success aims to share stories from local programs that are building community partnerships to strengthen and coordinate childhood programs.



Missouri Supporting Early Childhood Administrators (MO-SECA) hosts a series of learning academies aimed at helping early childhood leaders across the state

learn, grow, and connect with other trailblazers in the field to make a lasting impact on the early childhood education community. Recently, Kayla Todaro of the Office of Childhood's Compliance section and Meghan Leake of the Office of Childhood's Subsidy section had the opportunity to host a booth at MO-SECA's Leadership Academy in Branson, Missouri, running through June 6 and 7. Kayla and Meghan are excited to share their experience with this amazing opportunity to collaborate!

The MO-SECA learning academies are a fantastic place to connect with other early childhood leaders. When asked about running the booth, Kayla stated "It was great getting to see providers in-person and talk to them one-on-one and engage with them on where we are at on the rules project and how they can provide feedback." Meghan echoed this experience; "I was available to take any feedback providers had regarding Child Care Subsidy, as well as answer questions and give some guidance to providers who were interested in applying. My experience was great!"

The theme for this academy was "Foundation of Successful Leadership," which MO-SECA did an excellent job facilitating. In addition to panels and presentations on the subject, the Academy Learning Lounge held many booths hosted by professionals from across the early childhood education community with invaluable resources. When asked about the theme of the Academy, Kayla stated "A take-away I have from being in the Learning Lounge is that to be a successful leader in the child care world is to use the resources available to you. There is a plethora of free resources for child care providers in the state of Missouri." Megan also spoke in praise of the organization of MO-SECA, stating "The MO-SECA team was professional and helpful, making sure we had everything we need and went above and beyond to make us comfortable."

MO-SECA plans to host two more learning academies this season, which you can find further information on through [the Academy web page](#). Both teams are excited to pursue future opportunities in the Learning Lounge; for Compliance Kayla offered "I will personally be attending the MO-SECA Leadership Academy in Columbia in July. Caron Ahlemeyer will be attending the one in Saint Louis in August, representing OOC/Compliance." For development of future booths for Subsidy, Meghan supplied "I think it would be helpful to bring a second representative from our payment team so they could expand more on those specific, payment-related inquiries. Also adding more fun, unique ways to engage with the conference's attendees."

We would like to thank our wonderful OOC staff for representing us on this occasion. We also want to express our gratitude to the staff of MO-SECA, particularly Jacklyn Aldrich for her part in organizing the Learning Lounge. Together with other collaborators across the state, they make the future of Early Childhood Education across Missouri looks bright!

Archived Editions of Childhood Connections

[Visit the OOC webpage to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.](#)

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